

Formatting APA Headings

Upon completion of this lesson, you will be able to identify the appropriate level(s) of headings to use within a document and correctly format each heading following APA guidelines. The main reason for using headings is to organize the document. Headings provide the reader with a cue to the content of the successive section.

Reference Location(s) in the APA Manual

Refer to the following sections of the APA manual for specific formatting guidelines for headings:

Section	Content
3.12 Words Beginning a Sentence	Explains the guidelines for capitalizing words at the beginning of a sentence.
3.13 Major Words in Titles and Headings	Explains the guidelines for capitalizing words in headings
3.14 Proper Nouns and Trade Names	Explains the guidelines for capitalizing proper nouns, titles, trade names, laws, theories, and models.
3.31 Levels of Headings	Explains the usage of headings
3.32 Selecting the Levels of Headings	Explains the rules for applying heading levels
5.10 Headings	Summarizes the guidelines for formatting heading levels

Overview of the Formatting Guidelines

- There are five heading styles used in APA-formatted documents: Level 1, Level 2, Level 3, Level 4, and Level 5.
- As indicated by the table below, each heading level has a different format.

Level	Alignment	Capitalization	Italics	Other
Level 1	Centered between the left and right margin	Title case		
Level 2	Centered between the left and right margin	Title case	Yes	
Level 3	Left-aligned with the left margin	Title case	Yes	
Level 4	Indented 0.5 in. from the left margin	Sentence case	Yes	Inline with the subsequent paragraph Ends with a period
Level 5	Centered between the left and right margin	Uppercase		

- **Title case** means that the initial letter in major words in the heading is capitalized with the remaining letters in lowercase. Generally, words such as conjunctions, articles, and short prepositions are not capitalized unless they begin the heading.

- **Sentence case** means that the initial letter of the heading is capitalized with the remaining letters and words in lowercase. Capitalization of other words, such as proper nouns, depends on the function and length of the word. Refer to the guidelines on capitalization for the specific formatting guidelines.
- The way that you should format headings in a document depends on the number of heading levels used in the document. The number of heading levels is *not* the same as the number of headings. The heading levels refer to whether the document has main headings only, main headings and subheadings, or main headings, subheadings, and subsubheadings (similar to an outline). For example, a document that only has main headings has one level of headings. A document that has main headings and subheadings contains two or more heading levels. Below are examples of lists (outlines) with one, two, three, four, and five levels.

One Level	Two Levels	Three Levels	Four Levels	Five Levels
Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast
Lunch	Cereal	Cereal	Cereal	Cereal
Dinner	Omelets	Cornflakes	Cold	Cold
	Lunch	Wheaties	Cornflakes	Kellogg's
	Soups	Cheerios	Wheaties	Cornflakes
	Salads	Omelets	Cheerios	Special K
	Sandwiches	Ham	Hot	General Mills
		Veggie	Oatmeal	Wheaties
		Lunch	Grits	Cheerios
		Soups	Omelets	Hot
		Vegetable	Ham	Oatmeal
		Tomato	Veggie	Grits
			Lunch	Omelets
			Soups	Ham
			Vegetable	Veggie
			Tomato	Lunch
				Soups
				Vegetable
				Tomato

- Once you determine how many heading levels your document has, then you can determine how to format the headings. The best way to determine this is to construct an outline of your paper similar to the outlines in the above table. If your document contains only one level of headings, you should format them as Level 1 headings. If your document contains two levels of headings, you should use Level 1 for the main headings and Level 3 for the subheadings. Below are the rules for applying formatting based on the heading levels.

No. of Levels	Heading Formats to Use
One	Use Level 1 for all headings.
Two	Use Level 1 for the main headings; use Level 3 for the subheadings.
Three	Use Level 1 for the main headings; use Level 3 for the subheadings; use Level 4 for the subsubheadings.
Four	Use Level 1 for the main headings; use Level 2, Level 3, and Level 4, respectively

	for the subheading levels.
Five	Use Level 5 for the main headings; use Level 1, Level 2, Level 3, and Level 4, respectively for the subheading levels.

Examples of Headings

Correctly Formatted Headings

Below is an example of correctly formatted headings for a document with two levels of headings.

<p>The Learning Pathways to Smoking and the Implications for Interventions</p> <p><i>Affective Influences</i></p> <p><i>Sociocultural Influences</i></p> <p><i>Psychosocial Influences</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Implications for Smoking Interventions</p> <p><i>Affective Approaches</i></p> <p><i>Punitive Approaches</i></p>

Below is an example of correctly formatted headings for a document with three levels of headings.

<p>The Learning Pathways to Smoking and the Implications for Interventions</p> <p><i>Affective Influences</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Emotional development.</i> The learning process may begin as early as age...</p> <p><i>Sociocultural Influences</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Socialization.</i> Developmental theories suggest that the behavior of adolescents...</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Implications for Smoking Interventions</p> <p><i>Affective Approaches</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Exposure to stimuli.</i> Educators and researchers believe that one of the first...</p>
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Incorrectly Formatted Headings

Below is an example of incorrectly formatted headings for a document with two levels of headings.

THE LEARNING PATHWAYS TO SMOKING AND THE IMPLICATIONS
FOR INTERVENTIONS

Affective Influences Level 3 heading not italicized

Sociocultural Influences

Implications for smoking interventions Incorrect capitalization of Level 1 heading

Affective Approaches

Punitive approaches Incorrect capitalization of Level 3 heading

Below is an example of incorrectly formatted headings for a document with three levels of headings.

The Learning Pathways to Smoking and the Implications for Interventions

Affective Influences

Emotional development Level 4 heading not inline with subsequent paragraph

The learning process may begin as early as age...

Sociocultural Influences

Socialization Level 4 heading missing a period

Developmental theories suggest that the behavior of adolescents...

Implications for Smoking Interventions

Affective Approaches Incorrect alignment of Level 3 heading

Exposure to Stimuli Incorrect capitalization of Level 4 heading

Educators and researchers believe that one of the first...

Common Mistakes Made with Headings



Listed below are common mistakes made when formatting headings.

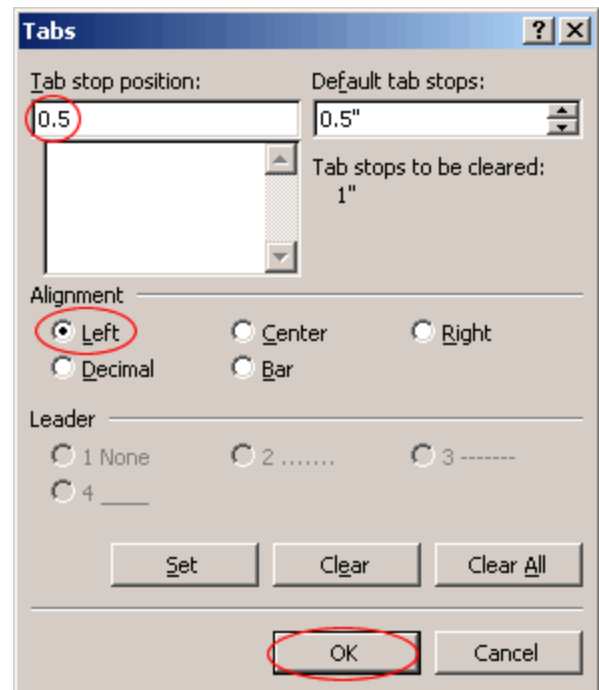
- Incorrect capitalization of words in the heading
- Incorrect application of italics
- Omission of the period from Level 4 headings
- Placement of Level 4 headings on a separate line from the subsequent paragraph
- No use of headings

Applying the Guidelines in MS Word

When formatting headings in MS Word, use the alignment tools for positioning text horizontally between the left and right margins.

To set or change the alignment of a paragraph or line of text:

1. Click within the line or paragraph to position the cursor or select the line or paragraph.
2. Click the appropriate alignment button ( to left-align the heading or  to center-align the heading).
3. For Level 4 headings, set left alignment, and use the Tab key on the keyboard to indent the heading. If the tab key does not automatically indent the heading by 0.5 in., you need to manually set the tab at 0.5:
 - a. Position the cursor at the beginning of the heading.
 - b. Select *tabs* from the *format* menu.
 - c. In the *tabs* dialog box:
 - i. Enter .5 in the box labeled *tab stop position*.
 - ii. Select *left* as the alignment.
 - iii. Click the *OK* button.



Reference

American Psychological Association. (2001). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (5th ed.). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.